Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Impact of spatial layout characteristics and perceived crowding on behavioural intention in Retail Stores.

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1. Introduction

Several studies have shown that retail businesses' physical environments have an impact on all aspects of the retailing store. Customers' purchase decisions are affected by their opinions on the store's products and services as well as their overall impression of the establishment. (Eroglu & Machleit, 1990) .Kotler first proposed the notion of "store atmosphere" in 1973; this refers to the work put into creating a retail space that evokes certain feelings in consumers. In a retail setting, a buyer will begin to make a purchase once they realize they have high expectations for the shop (Bohl, 2011). Retailers and shop owners are more concerned with their customers' in-store experiences as they follow the current trends toward retail innovation and development. It is well known that customers react not just to the quality of the goods or services they purchase, but also to the atmosphere of the business itself. This is due to the fact that the environment of a store has just as much of an impact on the customer's overall experience with their shopping experience as the store's offerings itself do (Kotler, 1973). As a matter of fact, Turley & Milliman (2000) held that the atmosphere of a store was a significant factor in a company's success or failure. The elements of a store's atmosphere are the ones that work together to provide a more pleasant shopping experience for customers.

Retail crowding is a well recognized shop atmospheric condition that has significant ramifications for both academics and retail management. With the high cost of retail space and the fierce competition in the retail industry, it is crucial to maximize customer traffic and

maximize the use of available floor space in order to retain a healthy profit margin. Still, the psychological strain of crowding depends on how you personally interpret the lack of physical space. Inadequate allocation of the store's space for selling, product, workers, and customers may contribute to a state of scarcity in a retail context, when numerous consumers may be present at once. There may be less space for customers to walk around and do their purchasing tasks, leading to an unpleasant sense of crowding. As a result, the layout design, which is the organization of the quantity or size of space for items and fixtures, plays a vital role in controlling the total retail congestion observed by consumers at the retail store. This study focuses on the potential implications of perceived congestion and shop layout on customer behaviour.

2 Review of Literature

This part discusses retail crowd management and retail crowd measuring techniques, therefore it offers a thorough assessment of the prior research on crowding in retail settings. In addition, it predicts with some certainty that the layout elements of a retail establishment may have a substantial effect on congestion, with diverse consequences for the customer experience.

2.1 Crowding

Some academics describe crowding as the state of being physically surrounded by a large number of people (Bechtel, 1997), while others define it as the sensation of being confined, obstructed, or frustrated in such a setting. However, Stokols (1972) creates a relationship between crowding and density. Density, the amount of people or things packed into a given area, is an objective measure that may be used as a predictor of subjective feelings of congestion. Therefore, the term "crowding" refers to a person's own subjective assessment of the actual density of a certain area. The human density, which includes fluctuations in the number of consumers present, has been the subject of most crowding study.

Zehrer and Raich (2016) seek to explain how perceived crowding impacts consumer

experience and satisfication . Several factors, such as a customer's demographics, influence their impression of congestion at winter sports facilities, as shown by a model that was both theoretically developed and practically validated. When people are in a confined space, they often resort to coping mechanisms that make the situation much more difficult. As a result of the psychological consequences of congestion and coping strategies, wintertime outdoor environments have a negative impact on customer satisfaction. The results emphasize the need of understanding and managing crowding as a construct for managers in the service sector to lessen the impact of an increase in dissatisfied consumers.

By contrast, research by Lee et al. (2011) indicates that shoppers' moods and actions take a nosedive when faced with heavy foot traffic at budget retailers. One of the world's most densely populated cities in East Asia, Taipei City, served as the setting for this research, in which participants were asked to recollect and see themselves back in the store's setting. Customers' sense of "being crowded" in a densely populated city is likely to signify varied degrees of density, which might account for the varying results.

Customers prefer a moderate degree of crowd over that with low or high dense crowds, as observed by Pan and Siemens (2010) in the context of product retail results, which show a curvilinear pattern. Additionally, there is a linear trend where consumers prefer less crowded retail environment in the case of service settings, with the exception being in situations of time pressure they may want to even pay more for service as the amount of crowding grows.

According to research by Whiting and Nakos (2008), visitors of retail establishments often find their shopping experiences more enjoyable if there are more people around. A lack of shoppers in a store might make it seem cold or unwelcoming, diminishing the shopper's experience. The level of happiness or discontent a customer experiences as a result of a wait time is based on their prior level of contentment with the company, according to research by Piyush Kumar (2005). As a consequence, the retailer's suggestion to improve service in order to shorten

customers' wait times has a favorable impact and spreads to its rivals thanks to shared consumers. In particular, enhancements like this increase overall happiness with the local shop while decreasing overall contentment with any potential rivals.

According to research by Eroglu et al. (2005), consumers' impressions of the crowd impact their loyalty to a certain retailer. A person's tolerance for perceived crowding , the amount of time spent shopping, one's degree of commitment to making a purchase, and whether or not a purchase was actually made all attenuate these effects. Furthermore, they argued that shoppers' feelings about the store's atmosphere moderate the impact of perceived crowding r on their buying experience. However, the connection between spatial perceived crowding and satisfaction is mediated by the buyers' emotional worth. These findings show that human perceived crowding , as a moderating variable, affects shopping-related happiness if taken into account positively.

In this research, Grewal et al. (2003) found that customers' evaluations of the store's ambiance were more negative when they anticipated longer wait times. In addition, they discovered that if a shop is seen to be busy, males are more likely to express pessimistic wait expectations than women. In their study, Machleit et al. (2000) shown that customers' happiness may be independent of the store's PCr level, depending instead on a variety of personal and contextual variables. They found that although emotions did have some bearing on the connection between PCr and happiness, tolerance for and anticipation of PCr were more significant in shaping the nature of that connection. They also discovered that the nature of the shop mattered for this correlation.

2.2 Customer Behavioural Intention

The study of consumer behaviour includes asking questions such "how," "what," "when," and

"why" consumers make certain purchases. It draws from several disciplines, including economics, sociology, anthropology, psychiatry, and psychology. Moreover, it looks at the psychology behind how shoppers make their purchases. In order to fully comprehend what it is that consumers are looking for, the research also takes into account demographic, psychographic, and behavioural data related to the target market (Sangvikar & Katole, 2012). One's propensity to engage in a certain purchase-related action is influenced by their mental state of mind as well as their own beliefs and reasons (Burnkrant & Page Jr, 1982). The amount of time a consumer spends in a store, whether or not they intend to make more purchases, and whether or not they would suggest the store to others are all important indicators of intent from a retail viewpoint (Baker et al, 2002).

Grewal et al. (2003) found a strong correlation between customers' perceptions of the store's atmosphere, their criteria for selecting a business, and their intentions to shop there. Grewal et al. (2003) claim that consumers may exert varying degrees of influence over a variety of elements that affect their propensity to make a purchase. Considerations range from the social to the design to the environmental (Grewal, 2003). Managers of retail outlets may influence shoppers' impressions and reactions to their establishments by strategically arranging and showcasing products. The shop manager may also improve the ambience by adjusting the store's visual displays, lighting, colour scheme, and scent (Kouchekian et al, 2012).

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According to research by Kang et al. (2010), consumers' desire to make a purchase is influenced

by elements such as the presence of engaging visuals, such as nice music, a pleasant aroma, bright lights, and soft fabrics. Consumers' behavioural intentions also include their propensity to make a purchase, invest additional resources into a transaction, return to a store, share their positive experience with others, and have faith in the surrounding community. Many studies have shown that one's behavioural intentions are highly predictive of one's actual behaviour. According to research by Kang et al. (2010), over half of all retail customers report being influenced to make a purchase at a business by the recommendations of friends and family.

2.3 Store layout

The delivery of services and the quality of those services are the primary criteria of a successful store design. However, there are six primary factors to take into account when deciding what constitutes a good retail appearance: contact with employees, business policies, the store's physical look, the company's premises, the ability to solve problems, and the store's convenience. (Siu and Cheung, 2001) show that the most fundamental marketing technique for businesses to build competitive advantages and improve consumers' shopping experiences is the influence of physical appearance and convenience. The store's outside look has a disproportionately high bearing on customer satisfaction, repeat business, and incremental spending (Siu and Cheung, 2001).

According to research by Vrechopoulos et al. (2004), the layout of a store has a significant impact on customer behaviour and is a key determinant in the branding of a business. A store's layout has a significant impact on its customer flow, ambiance, customer behaviour, and overall productivity, making it one of the most crucial aspects of a retail establishment.

According to the research of Moerloose et al. (2005), the retail sector may function well with as few as two doors and as many as three entrances that are all easily accessible to customers. Customers are more likely to shop at a retail establishment if it is convenient to enter and looks welcoming.

According to studies conducted by Pan et al. (2008), consumers' attitudes about making purchases are heavily influenced by the store's ambiance, especially when making impulsive purchases. In other words, customers' perceptions of the shop and the items on display are influenced by the business's distinctive signals, which in turn impact the customers' desire to purchase and their actual behaviour in the store. To create a positive store environment, retailers often aim to appeal to customers' emotions and, in turn, their spending habits. Everything from the actual goods on display and the sales process to the follow-up services and, most importantly, the vibe of the store as a whole fall under this umbrella term.

According to Dion (2004), crowding is about more than just the number of people in a room. People become more aware of the possible limitations of restricted space when density is juxtaposed with specific social and personal conditions. Because of these limitations, there is a known discrepancy between the individual's space requirements and the actual space they have at their disposal. In order to maintain service quality in crowded environments, it is crucial to have a firm grasp of the connections between crowding and individual agency. To properly comprehend retail crowding, it is helpful to distinguish between cognitive and emotive crowding, which may have different outcomes. Perhaps one can get insight into the function of individual agency in the crowding process if the two concepts are disentangled.

According to Emberson et al. (2006), the visibility of in-store merchandising as a potential solution has increased as a result of recent efforts like efficient customer response. Increasing store traffic and inventory availability has become a motto of the retail industry. The business risks losing the transaction and maybe the customer if the item is not available when the customers come to make their pick. Store visits provide evidence that various store groups have varying procedures, suggesting that merchandisers' methods of getting things done may differ.

Merchandisers noted that the policies of the store group, stock control, staffing levels, and the volume of customer traffic all had an impact on their daily operations.

Given that most stores have little resources to spare, Feinberg et al. (2002) argue that it is wise to determine which relatively few elements really affect consumer satisfaction and foot traffic. By definition, retail should be at the forefront of innovative customer flow strategies. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that discussions on retail traffic flow are commonplace in academic and corporate circles. Store traffic analysis allows for centralized, automated customer service. Shoppers are happier, spend more money, and remain loyal as a result of the money put into improving shop traffic. If a client isn't valuable to a company, they should attempt to survive without them for a month. A consumer who is happy with the service they get is more likely to return and spend more money over time. There's no denying the importance of traffic to retail establishments. The market suffers when a consumer is unhappy because that person is more likely to defect to a competitor and to convince others to defect as well.

To acquire the utilitarian value of shopping, Cottet et al. (2006) argue that convenience in obtaining goods and data is paramount. The utilitarian value is determined by the manner in which the consumer's want, which motivated the purchase, was satisfied. Hedonic value is impacted by characteristics such as atmosphere, customer service, and crowd size, among others, while utilitarian value is often related with product availability. Retailers benefit from understanding whether and how perceived value influences customer loyalty. If this is the case, then we need to come up with strategies and typologies to prevent congestion (Dion, 2004).

Retail has been sluggish to implement sustainable construction standards for a number of reasons, according to Hayter et al. (2000). The need for speed in retail space construction (which leaves little time for design) and the unknown impact of non-standard building envelopes and systems on foot traffic are two such drivers. The retail industry has a wealth of

expertise managing store lighting and other factors to maximize profits. Many shops are hesitant to install ventilation systems for fear of seeing a drop in sales, which would ultimately mean less money in their coffers. The biggest potential for saving money on energy and boosting customer satisfaction came from sprucing up the ventilation systems.

According to Kotzab and Teller (2005), in today's ultra-competitive and global retail landscape, retailers must achieve extraordinary results by juggling a wide variety of decisions, including store placement, product selection, target market targeting, supplier negotiations, employee motivation, and the more routine matters of store ventilation and merchandising. Since the 1990s, retailers have realized the value of improving their ventilation systems to attract more customers and make their stores more pleasant places to spend time. The efficacy of a store's ventilation system is measured by its ability to provide the ideal environment for customers to shop in.

According to Levy and Weitz (2007), the purpose of retail lighting goes beyond providing visibility. Lighting has the power to accentuate products, shape the layout of the business, and evoke an emotional response from customers. Research has revealed that stores with better lighting have happier customers. Exciting the customer with the store's lighting design is a top priority. The writers go on to say that music, like color and lighting, may enhance or detract from the overall ambiance of a store. However, music may be readily altered in contrast to other components of ambiance. Music may also be used to influence shoppers' decisions in stores. The pace of traffic, the atmosphere of the business, and the focus of customers' attention may all be influenced by the music played there. Although, in general, slow music is preferable. Listening to a combination of classical or other calming music while window shopping might help customers relax and focus on the products.

Lighting, according to Hoyle (2003), has the potential and probability of significantly affecting sales in any retail store or the business environment because it can increase traffic, create visual attention, bring effect to the color contract of products, and direct customers going through the store either deeper or further. According to Mehrabian et al. (1974), lighting is a component of environmental psychology that may influence the customer's mood and overall impression of the business. Stores often use bright lighting because customers are more likely to inspect and interact with merchandise if it is well lit. The visual appeal of merchandise in a business may also be affected by the lighting. For the most part, consumers considered brighter items more appealing than darker ones.

Bright lights and upbeat music have been shown to raise customer excitement and a sense of urgency, as reported by Donnovan et al. (1994). Vaccaro (2009) argues that strategic lighting may be used to draw customers' attention to certain items, preserve a particular moment in time, and conceal any retail flaws or mistakes. Some stores may purposely keep some sections of their stores in the dark as a plan to preserve a positive public perception. Changing the lighting of a business may have a significant impact on customers' impressions of the store's atmosphere, presentation, and overall appeal. Lighting may also have an effect on consumers' perceptions, evaluations, and ultimately their purchasing decisions.

Most studies, both old and new, have examined the relationship between store layout and customer behaviour, and they have shown a considerable positive correlation. Supermarkets and hypermarkets were not thoroughly examined in Indian studies and there have only been a relatively small number of studies conducted that look at the link between behavioural intention with shop layout and perceived congestion.

3. Problem Statement

There has been a lot of commercial and academic research on customers' real and perceived crowding levels in retail outlets, but many concerns remain unsolved. In today's era of post-

industrialization and post-globalization, many corporations understand the significance of a store's actual layout to the success of their operations. Since the customer is today more alert, sensitive, and well-informed than ever before due to the broad diffusion of information and news, the issue has significant relevance. Customers are more inclined to shop at stores they are acquainted with and less likely to visit a business with a poor reputation. Due to the negative press, customers who think this store could be just up their alley end up being dissatisfied or even offended when they actually step foot inside. In addition, a Also, congestion is a known detracter from a store's overall appeal. Managers need to ensure that the store's positioning strategy is consistent with the store's atmosphere and appearance in order to make a positive impression on customers. The study's overarching goal is to shed light on this developing trend by analyzing how store layout and customer crowding influence the formation of customers' impressions and determining whether or not managers should take these factors into account when enacting a specific spatial planning strategy. It is important to examine the many inferences consumers may draw and understand the structural characteristics leading to a choice to purchase at the business or not in order to provide recommendations about how a given positioning strategy may be paired with varying degrees of perceived congestion.

4. Aim

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence that a Spatial layout on the perception of crowding and the behavioural Intention of the consumer.

5. Objective

The key objectives of this study are as follows:

- To determine the essential characteristics of the layout of the retail store
- To determine how store layout characteristics would affect perceptions of crowding
- To determine how perceptions of crowding would affect customers' behaviour

- To analyse how store layout and perceptions of crowding can affect customers' behavioural intention.

6. Rationale

This study's results will hopefully guide the development of convenience shops in India so that they better serve the needs of consumers. Measure and evaluate traffic flow, illumination, and crowd density; quantify the impacts of store layout and challenges linked with perceived crowding. The study's real value, however, lies in the hope that it will lead to improved store design thanks to the retailer's commitment to providing exceptional service.

7. Motivation of study

The suggested research will aid in explaining the role of behavioural factors in understanding human behaviour. It will be useful in determining the effect of retail store design. The more you know about how customers react, the easier it will be to choose and build a business that has a favorable influence on customers. Apart from this, there hasn't been a lot of research on how store layout affects customers' actions, especially in the Indian setting and specifically in the state of Gujarat, where a lot of people shop at department stores. This opens up possibilities for this research in India, particularly with regards to the department store retail structure. Given that India is rapidly becoming a major retail market, it is vital that we figure out whether or whether the design of department stores influences customer behaviour via the buffering of crowding.

8. Research Questions

A few questions were generated in this research to answer the following questions regarding the aspects that may affect the shop environment with store layout and crowded perception that effect the behavioural intention. The following research question will drive the investigations in the research study:

1. Which characteristics of a store's layout contribute most to the establishment's success relative to customers' actual behaviour in the store
2. What is the relation between store layout attributes and customers behaviour?
3. What is the relation between the perceptions of crowding and customers behaviour?
4. How the perceptions of crowding meditate the relation between the store layout characteristics and customers behaviour?

9. Hypotheses of the Study

- H1: There is a significant relationship between Retail spatial layout Characteristics and customers' behaviour.
- H2: Relationship between Retail spatial layout Characteristics and customer's behavioural intentions for the store is significantly moderated by different demographic variables
- H3: There is a significant relationship between crowding perception of consumers and behavioral intentions.
- H4: Relationship between crowding perception of consumers and behavioral intentions for the store is significantly moderated by different demographic variables.
- H5 :There is significant relation between behavioural intentions and Store layout with mediating perceived crowding for Different demographic variables

10. Methodology

There are three different ways to do research and analysis: via experimentation, historical examination, or descriptive investigations. Descriptive research is being conducted for the purpose of gathering descriptive data for the current study. This is a quantitative analysis in nature. We will uses mail survey methodologies for this investigation. This method encourages selected responders to complete surveys. The people that were chosen were given a link to the Google Forms. The survey was divided into four sections: demographics, perceived crowding,

store layout, and behaviour intention. The sample data will be generalized using quantitative analysis. The following are the different quantitative variables to be considered using the mathematical method to determine the sample size (n) of the infinite population:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 * p * (1-p)}{C^2}$$

$$= (\frac{1.96)^2 * 0.3 \; x \; 0.3}{(0.04)^2} = 600$$

Where: Z = Z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

P = Population proportion (expressed as decimal) assumed to be 0. (30%)

C = Margin of Error at 4% (0.04)

Hence, by using (Bill Godden, 2004) formula with the population proportion 30%, the required sample size is 200. There may be the possibility of non-response by customers hence sample will be taken as 216.

Secondary data will be collected from journals, newspapers, books, internet etc .The study will evaluate the data using descriptive statistics, regression, ANOVA, Cronbach's alpha, and correlation test. A organized and standardized questionnaire with a combination of close ended and scale-type items will be used as the research instrument.

11. Expected Outcomes

The layout of a store is an essential aspect influencing customer behaviour and a significant determinant in the construction of a retail image. Layouts that are well-designed have a significant impact on in-store traffic patterns, retail atmosphere, consumer behavior, and

experience. The study's projected findings are that store layout features and perceived crowding would be the key factors affecting individual behaviour of retail store visitors. As a result, It is recommended that retail store brands pay attention to these areas and implement the necessary processes to help customers in need.

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